



Blaine, Camas, Cassia, Gooding, Jerome, Lincoln, Minidoka & Twin Falls counties

## REGIONAL NEWS

Snowpack predictions in mid-December indicated 68 percent of normal compared to 70 percent of normal at the same time last year, which was one of the driest on record. But as 2007 ended, the snowpack was at 83 percent following a series of storms. January will be a critical month in determining water levels for the region. An above average year is necessary to avoid groundwater curtailment that was a close call last summer.

### CAMAS COUNTY

- Soldier Mountain Ski Resort will host the Hartford U.S. Disabled Alpine Ski Championships in March. The event has been in the making for three years and is expected to draw up to 70 racers, their friends, families and coaches. The economic impact for both Camas County and Blaine County should be significant with the sponsor, Hartford Insurance, booking rooms and conferences at the Sun Valley Lodge for the event. The Mint bar in Hailey has been designated as headquarters for the administrative functions.
- Seventeen dog sled teams from around the Intermountain West participated during the weekend before Christmas in the first dog sled race in Fairfield since the 1930s. Wendy Arrota of Condon, Mont., won the 16-mile, six-dog race that was to have begun in downtown Fairfield but had to be moved 15 miles north for better snow conditions. In the 1920s and 1930s, dog sledding was a popular sport on the Camas Prairie, and a partnership of the Chamber of Commerce, the school district and Camas County mushers hopes it will become an annual event.

### TWIN FALLS COUNTY

- The Idaho Community Foundation, which manages 370 individual funds, has awarded over \$23,000 in grants and donations to nine south central Idaho governments and groups. Foundation President Cathy Silak says the diversity of the funds and the grants they provide show how even small amounts can make a big difference in Idaho communities.
- A building renovated into a mini-mall in Buhl has a new tenant. Tammie Peterson owns Mud Creek

## Grants Awarded by the Idaho Community Foundation

City	Project to be Funded
Bliss	\$250 for a new fire pump
Buhl	\$2,000 to purchase service pagers for the Buhl Fire Department
Carey	\$5,000 to refurbish the children's section of the library
Gooding	\$4,000 to the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind
Murtaugh	\$2,500 to the Murtaugh Joint School District
Twin Falls	\$3,000 to the Valley Housing Coalition
Twin Falls	\$721 to the YMCA of Twin Falls
Twin Falls	\$1,785 for the Boys & Girls Club of the Magic Valley
Magic Valley	\$4,167 to Family Health Services for children's dental sealants and education

Store, offering a wide array of gifts, screen prints, embroidery items and Idaho souvenirs. Also in the mall are Butterworth Concrete and Excavation; Regie and Sons Construction Inc., which did the renovation; and Contractor Solutions, an insurance firm operated by Tammie Peterson.

- The new owners of CloverLeaf Creamery, formerly Smith's Dairy, hope to begin home delivery of the milk from their pasture-fed cows sometime in 2008. Bill and Donna Stoltzfus, who had been selling their milk to Smith's for years, bought the plant last summer and have completed renovations, including the means to fill glass bottles instead of plastic. While not certified as organic Bill Stoltzfus says the dairy operation is run as naturally as possible. Current operations include 11 pastures, which are used to rotate dairy cows during the summer. During the winter, they revert to alfalfa and grain feed. The milk is marketed directly from their store in Buhl or through Idaho's Bounty, a cooperative that distributes local produce and products in the Wood River Valley area and will be the base for CloverLeaf's home delivery.

- Sunset Manor is under new ownership in Buhl. The non-profit Boise Housing Corp., who purchased the property, is committed to offering affordable housing with government rent subsidies to qualifying elderly and disabled residents. Tomlinson & Associates will oversee management. Financing was obtained through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development agency.
- Windy Sage Pottery is a new studio featuring pottery from Idaho. Larry and Mickey Davidson, who moved to Buhl from New Mexico five years ago, create functional pieces, applying glazes made of Idaho native materials.
- Kay's Unique Photos opened earlier this fall in Buhl, offering photographs of individuals, families, groups, children and pets before more than 1,000 back-grounds.
- Buhl High School will provide tutors to students who are not achieving C grades or failing to turn in their work. START, Students Taking a Right Turn, begins Jan. 21. It has been effective at Twin Falls High School and provides students with counselors to answer questions and ensure that their work is completed. The goal is to increase the graduation rate and to enhance college preparation.
- The community of Hansen has been fortunate to have Mercy Housing, a nonprofit self-help housing organization, as a partner in building homes for seven families. It took 10 months to complete because the families provided 65 percent of the work, which not only gives them a sense of pride and accomplishment but reduces their mortgage amounts. The 34 members of the seven families had to juggle school, work and family, learn construction skills and in some cases, pay off debt to qualify for the mortgage.
- Beefjerky.com of Twin Falls officially sent its product into outer space on board the space shuttle Endeavor this fall. Astronauts have smuggled the beef jerky in their space suits in the past. It's the fourth time that the online business has sent its jerky into space. "I named it Final Frontier Jerky because the whole space theme fit in with the online crowd, which is how we market and sell the jerky," owner Gregory Nemitz said. "After some of the astronauts were able to try it, they started asking for it." Nemitz said Beefjerky.com this year donated about 2 pounds of jerky to NASA, which repackaged it into 2-ounce packages for the crew — part of a strict safety policy. "If the black pepper got loose it could get into their eyes," he said.
- The Twin Falls School District has estimated the over-run costs for the new Canyon Ridge High School and other projects are up to \$7 million. They blame inflation, material scarcity and a low number of bidders on the projects. The district has scheduled a March 2008 vote on a plant facilities levy, which would cover some of the cost without raising the existing tax rate. Parts of one school are 100 years old and several schools are over 50 years old but have been maintained and remodeled to remain functional.
- Burger 'n Kabob is finishing up work on its first restaurant in Twin Falls, located near downtown. A second restaurant is being considered where the former Skippers restaurant was located northwest of downtown.
- Zulu Bagels and Java Jungle have opened in a complex anchored by TKO Homes. Ann's Décor is the third tenant in this newly constructed corner strip mall in a Twin Falls residential neighborhood that is transitioning to commercial.
- Foundation work is continuing on the new St. Luke's Magic Valley Regional Medical Center in Twin Falls, and details are being finalized on finishing and equipment. As of December, the projected cost was \$170 million for the four-story, 600,000-square-foot complex. The College of Southern Idaho is receiving a \$10,000 donation for scholarships in the horticulture program in exchange for raising 1,000 trees to be transplanted on the hospital grounds over the next three years. The hospital project should be completed in mid-2010.
- In an effort to expand the pool of dental assistants, a private dentist is offering a weekend program to train students for certification. The program called Assist to Succeed will be held at Canyon Gate Dental each



Space shuttle Endeavor blasts off from Kennedy Space Center in Florida Last fall, the shuttle carried beef jerky provided by an Idaho company — the fourth time the product has traveled into space..

Saturday for 11 weeks. The median hourly wage in south central Idaho for dental assistants is \$10.97, according to the 2007 Idaho Department of Labor Occupational Employment and Wage Survey. The job outlook for dental assistants in the Magic Valley is good.

- With the Snake River Valley designated an American Viticulture Area, wineries and vineyards should expect increased interest in their products. Twin Falls County is home to a handful of small wineries such as Hegy's South Hills Winery, which produces strictly for special events at 250 cases per year of Riesling, merlot and chardonnay. Holesinsky Winery, which specializes in certified organic wines, plans to nearly double production in 2008 from its current level of 500 cases. Hagerman's Thousand Springs Winery and Blue Rock Winery of Buhl are also larger producers, and new wineries are expected to develop in light of the federal designation. Idaho is known for lower cost real estate and lower business costs so growth in the industry is inevitable. Clustering of wine growers and makers will garner more attention to the area and enhance creativity and development.
- A new copy service has opened in the Lynwood Plaza. Copy It offers digital scanning, blue print copying, color copies and a variety of photo gifts.
- Syringa Wireless has moved to a new location next to the new Starbucks.
- Riediesel Engineering has expanded its lab after doing business in Twin Falls for five years. The engineering firm provides moisture density curves, atterberg limits, sand equivalency, cleanness values, sieve analysis, extraction gradation of bituminous mixes, aggregate specific gravities and aggregate unit weights.

#### **GOODING COUNTY**

- The Gooding County Historical Museum received a \$2,000 grant for a new computer program to catalog the collection's antiques and historical items. The new museum has raised \$80,000 of its \$145,000 goal. This grant, the first the organization has received, was awarded by the Idaho Community Foundation's board from the Steele-Reese Project Fund.
- The State Department of Health and Welfare has revoked the license of the Gooding Rehabilitation and Living Center. The facility is owned by Northwest Bec-Corp of Pocatello. The center has 28 days to appeal the decision, apparently prompted by a resident's suicide. The facility was also on a national list of 54 nursing homes providing poor quality care. Northwest Bec-Corp also has nursing homes in Buhl, Burley, Kimberly, Shoshone and Wendell.

#### **JEROME COUNTY**

- Elementary students in Jerome opened the winter semester in the new Summit Elementary School. They moved their books and supplies over to the new school prior to the Christmas break. The over 500 fourth and fifth graders left their handprints in the basement of the school and had pictures taken next to the item they liked best about their old school. The new school was designed by LKV Architects with air conditioning and energy efficiency that were lacking in the old school. Voters approved a \$25 million bond for the new elementary school and a middle school scheduled to open this spring.
- The Idaho Dairymen's Association and the Idaho Cattle Association are suing the Jerome County Commission, claiming it illegally extended the moratorium on new confined animal feeding operations beyond the 180 day limit without required public hearings and commentary.

#### **MINI-CASSIA COUNTIES**

- Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter has approved a \$500,000 Rural Community Block Grant to expand the sewer system southwest of Burley to the area where DOT Foods, Packaging Specialties and Pacific Ethanol are locating creating more than 200 jobs. Potentially, DOT could add another 300 jobs if it converts its facility into a primary redistribution center.
- High Desert Milk and Redox Chemical in Burley will receive a total of \$380,000 in low-interest loans to improve rail transportation. The Eastern Idaho Railroad has been awarded \$602,000 low-interest loan to upgrade 1.2 miles of track and six switches to support the Pacific Ethanol plant. The loans are being made through the Rural Economic Development and Integrated Freight Transportation Program, which was created by the Idaho Legislature in 2006 to improve short-line rail service for rural businesses. Up to 90 percent of the costs can be financed at 2 percent to 4 percent annually.
- The Mini-Cassia Economic Development Commission, under the new leadership of Chairman Mark Maier, has made business retention and expansion a priority. A new committee will initially identify the challenges and issues affecting business in Cassia and Minidoka counties and then offer solutions. A solid supply of volunteers will be needed to gather this information from companies. Teams of two to three individuals will be sent out to survey companies throughout the area. Over the past five years, the Mini-Cassia area has experienced negative population growth. This new program paired with past economic development efforts should create positive population growth for the area in the very near future.

- The Renova Energy ethanol plant's construction has been put on hold due to cost overruns. The company has halted construction as well as trading of its stock on the London Stock Exchange until further notice. The project in Heyburn is 60 percent complete and was scheduled to begin operations this spring. The plant is projected to employ approximately 35 workers. The production of corn has been beefed up globally due to both renewable fuel ventures and higher standards of living in countries with increasingly high population growth. In the past, global grain consumption has risen at approximately 1.2 percent a year, but with improving economies in China and elsewhere and increased use of grain, especially corn, for fuel are now pushing worldwide demand for grain up 2 percent a year, an all time high. The price of fuel along with the limited number of acres producing high grain yields is forcing overall food prices to rise.
- The Pacific Ethanol plant is scheduled to start operations in March and the company has started hiring workers. Training and human resource informational sessions are scheduled for January and February. Production training for specific jobs will occur at operational sites in other states. The plant expects to hire up to 50 workers.
- The Raft River Junior/Senior High School was recognized in U.S. News and World Report's ranking of America's Best High Schools, earning a bronze designation based on performance on standardized tests, performance of disadvantaged students and success in providing college-level coursework. It was one of 21 Idaho schools recognized by the magazine.
- Pomerelle Ski Resort opened in late December, marking the latest opening in 27 years. The snow has been dry with a tendency to blow off the mountain so the snow making machines have been used to put down a good base. Late December storms have helped establish the base but at 14 inches with 31 inches at the top, the resort opened with limited runs. It had recovered by Jan. 1 with 85 inches of snow at the summit and all runs open.
- A special panel committed to solving the southern and eastern Idaho water crisis is considering raising the height of the Minidoka Dam by five feet at Lake Walcott. Currently about 95,000 acre feet of water is impounded in the lake. The cost is estimated at \$100 million plus the cost of converting all groundwater users to surface water and developing a system to distribute the water. The committee believes converting to surface distribution will help recharge the Snake River Plain Aquifer. The proposal will be discussed with the Department of Water Resource and the House Resources and Conservation Committee in the coming weeks.
- Christensen Machine Inc. is adding 4,400 square feet to its custom machining, welding, fabricating, repair and manufacturing operation. The expansion will be more energy efficient and accommodate Computer Numerical Control milling equipment. The company is capitalizing on the school district decision to partner with the College of Southern Idaho to provide training in computer numerical control operations. The company has a piece of the global market and ships internationally.
- Henry's at the Drift Inn in Rupert has been renovated and offers a full menu in the dining room, which will seat 35. There is a full bar and a banquet room that will accommodate 50. Future plans include renovation of the kitchen and the banquet room. The facility is on the National Historic Register so all changes will reflect early 1900s architecture. Future plans would include an eight-room bed and breakfast with view rooms on the top floor. The business currently has 22 employees.
- Foxy's Salon has moved to a new location that fits its needs better with more parking. The salon offers hair, nail, massage and cosmetology services.
- Dreamz Day Spa and Salon recently had its grand opening in Burley. This is a full-service spa with a nail technician and massage therapist on site.
- Another example of local entrepreneurship is Cowboy Tom's Flapjacks of Declo which offers a gift package of the storybook "The Legend of Cowboy Tom," whole wheat flapjack mix and a couple bottles of syrup made from locally processed sugar beets.
- The Minidoka County School District is implementing a program designed by Southern Idaho Partners Against Drugs to reward students pledging not to take drugs and agreeing to random drug testing. The organization will pay for the tests, but it is unclear who will administer them. There will be incentives for those kids testing negative. This is an effort to stave off the methamphetamine use that is affecting many communities.
- New school construction in the Minidoka County School District is running into some of the same problems that other large commercial construction projects are encountering — escalating material costs. The \$14 million bond voters approved in May 2006 for new elementary schools in Acequia and Heyburn plus a new multi-purpose room for Paul Elementary is now about \$3 million short. The construction company that was awarded the general contracting bid did not have the required public works license so the contract has to be rebid. Officials estimate construction costs have climbed 30 percent since the bond was originally approved.

- Oakley Valley Potatoes was purchased by Sun Valley Potatoes, a fresh pack operation. Sun Valley Potatoes is the only grower-owned cooperative that operates a sales and packing facility in Idaho. Approximately 20 growers supply the facility in Paul with Norkotah, russet Burbank and Gem Russets. Sun Valley Potatoes sells nationally and internationally.
- The tuber has garnered much needed attention lately with the Healthy Mr. Potato Head giant balloon appearing in the annual Macy's Thanksgiving Parade. Cheryl Koopman of American Falls is the co-chair for the United States Potato Board's International Marketing Committee, which put the campaign together. She worked as a balloon handler in the parade. A dancing Healthy Mr. Potato Head is also available for school assemblies across the country to motivate kids to get up and dance. The purpose of the ad campaign is to promote the vitamins and minerals found naturally in the potato. More can be found at the following Web site: [www.undergroundpotato.com](http://www.undergroundpotato.com).



Mr. Potato head floats above the streets of Manhattan in the annual Macy's Day Parade. Cheryl Koopman of American Falls was a balloon handler in the 2007 event.

- The Idaho Army National Guard Armory renovation in Burley is all but complete. The \$1.1 million project includes a new kitchen, drill hall, bathrooms, reconfigured classrooms and a reception room. The mechanical systems, lighting, tile and carpet are being upgraded. The outside compound and parking lot are being enlarged as well. The community will be able to use the facility for certain community events in addition to enhancing recruitment efforts and improving the Guard's efficiency. State and federal money financed the project.
- BLAINE COUNTY**
- Fundraisers for firemen throughout the Wood River Valley were extremely successful, raising over \$173,000 with the help of local resident celebrities such as Steve Miller and Carole King
  - Our Lady of the Snows Catholic Church held a dedication mass for 400. The \$4.5 million church, designed by Idaho architect Jim McLaughlin, showcases a 150-year-old Italian wooden statue of Mary and Jesus and a chandelier with 2,200 hand-blown flowers suspended from fiber optic filaments. The footprint of the building is smaller than the previous church but the basement housing classrooms and the parish hall provides a total of 11,290 square feet. A quarry near Galena Summit provided the rock that envelopes the exterior of the church.
  - The Blaine County Commission and Hailey City Council have officially approved the Friedman Memorial Airport Authority. The action was requested by the Federal Aviation Administration, which felt the authority did not speak for the entire region. The new location is east of state Highway 75 and south of state Highway 20 and Timmerman Hill. The projected cost of the airport is between \$80 million and \$100 million. The new regional airport is projected to be completed by 2016 assuming FAA approval. Relocation was prompted by the lack of room to expand the existing facility to handle larger aircraft.
  - Ketchum City Council members have exempted new large hotels from providing community housing in 20 percent of their gross floor area if their building permits are issued by June 1, 2010. This was an incentive to bring hotels into the area. It does not exempt hoteliers from providing housing for employees equal to 25 percent of their rooms. Currently, hotels, restaurants and recreation account for 22 percent of the county's nonfarm jobs.
  - The water rights adjudication in the Wood River Basin has generated 2,999 objections to many of the 2,199 water rights claims. This is the last basin to be adjudicated, and many issues are being raised. Because of the relative wealth of water rights holders in the Wood River Basin, lawsuits may be used more to settle disputes than in the other areas of the state that are being adjudicated.

***See page 37 for south central Idaho labor force and nonfarm jobs data table for November 2007.***

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Jan Roeser, Regional Economist  
420 Falls Ave., Twin Falls, ID 83301  
(208) 735-2500, ext. 3639  
E-mail: [jan.roeser@labor.idaho.gov](mailto:jan.roeser@labor.idaho.gov)

## South Central Idaho Data – November 2007

### Twin Falls-Jerome MicSA Labor Force & Employment – Twin Falls and Jerome counties

	Nov 2007*	Oct 2007	Nov 2006	<u>% Change From</u>	
				Last Month	Last Year
<b>INDIVIDUALS BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE</b>					
<i>Seasonally Adjusted</i>					
Civilian Labor Force	48,570	48,900	48,910	-0.7	-0.7
Unemployment	1,080	990	1,390	9.1	-22.3
% of Labor Force Unemployed	2.2	2.0	2.8		
Total Employment	47,490	47,910	47,520	-0.9	-0.1
<i>Unadjusted</i>					
Civilian Labor Force	49,370	49,720	49,260	-0.7	0.2
Unemployment	1,000	770	1,320	29.9	-24.2
% of Labor Force Unemployed	2.0	1.6	2.7		
Total Employment	48,370	48,950	47,940	-1.2	0.9
<b>JOBS BY PLACE OF WORK</b>					
<b>Nonfarm Payroll Jobs**</b>	41,450	41,380	39,700	0.2	4.4
<b>Goods-Providing Industries</b>	7,680	7,890	7,020	-2.7	9.4
Natural Resources & Mining	30	30	30	0.0	0.0
Construction	2,530	2,550	2,390	-0.8	5.9
Manufacturing	5,120	5,310	4,600	-3.6	11.3
Food Manufacturing	2,880	3,070	2,500	-6.2	15.2
Other Manufacturing	2,240	2,240	2,100	0.0	6.7
<b>Service-Providing Industries</b>	33,770	33,490	32,680	0.8	3.3
Trade, Transportation & Utilities	11,030	10,690	10,280	3.2	7.3
Wholesale Trade	1,980	1,990	1,900	-0.5	4.2
Retail Trade	6,470	6,190	6,050	4.5	6.9
Utilities	140	140	150	0.0	-6.7
Transportation & Warehousing	2,440	2,370	2,180	3.0	11.9
Information	660	650	630	1.5	4.8
Financial Activities	1,620	1,690	1,720	-4.1	-5.8
Professional & Business Services	4,850	4,720	4,900	2.8	-1.0
Educational & Health Services	5,410	5,390	5,100	0.4	6.1
Leisure & Hospitality	3,060	3,120	3,010	-1.9	1.7
Other Services	1,450	1,470	1,410	-1.4	2.8
Government Education	3,410	3,400	3,290	0.3	3.6
Government Administration	2,280	2,360	2,340	-3.4	-2.6

\*Preliminary Estimate

\*\*Full- or part-time jobs of people who worked for or received wages in the pay period including the 12th of the month